

Appendix A

Content Analysis Process

Public responses on the CEQ Review of NEPA are documented and analyzed using a process called content analysis. This is a systematic process of compiling and categorizing all public viewpoints and concerns submitted on a plan or project. Information from public meetings, letters, emails, faxes, and other sources are all included in this analysis.

In the content analysis process, each response is assigned a unique number. This number allows analysts to link specific comments to original responses. All respondents' names and addresses are entered into a project-specific database program, enabling creation of a complete list of all respondents.

Analysts read and code responses using the coding structure. Each comment is coded by subject and verified by a second analyst for accuracy and consistency. Then all coded comments are entered verbatim into a comment database. Database reports track all input and allow analysts to identify public concerns and to analyze the relationships among them. The final analysis document includes an executive summary, which discusses respondents' main areas of concern, and a formal list of public concern statements. Each public concern statement is accompanied by one or more sample excerpts from original responses.

This process and the resulting document do not replace responses in their original form. Rather, they provide a map to the responses and other input on file at the offices of the Content Analysis Team (CAT) in Salt Lake City. Interested parties are encouraged to read public comment firsthand.

It is important to recognize that the consideration of public comment is not a vote-counting process in which the outcome is determined by the majority opinion. Relative depth of feeling and interest among the public can serve to provide a general context for decision-making. However, it is the appropriateness, specificity, and factual accuracy of comment content that serves to provide the basis for modifications to planning documents and decisions. Further, because respondents are self-selected, they do not constitute a random or representative public sample. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) encourages all interested parties to submit comment as often as they wish regardless of age, citizenship, or eligibility to vote. Respondents may therefore include businesses, people from other countries, children, and people who submit multiple responses. Therefore, caution should be used when interpreting comparative terms in the summary document. Every substantive comment and suggestion has value, whether expressed by one respondent or many. All input is read and evaluated and the analysis team attempts to capture all relevant public concerns in the analysis process.